

Jeremiah. 17:5-10

- 5 Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength,
whose hearts turn away from the LORD.
- 6 They shall be like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see when relief comes.
They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.
- 7 Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
- 8 They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.
- 9 The heart is devious above all else;
it is perverse—
who can understand it?
- 10 I the LORD test the mind
and search the heart,
to give to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their doings.

Luke 6:17-26

17 He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. 18 They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19 And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

20 Then he looked up at his disciples and said:
“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 “Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

Luke 6:22 “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

24 “But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

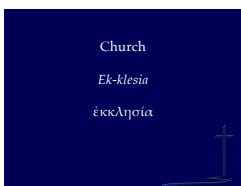
25 “Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

Luke 6:26 “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Church
Eκ-κλῆσiα
ἐκκλησία

Intro:



We are here today as a manifestation, of the *Ek-klesia* of God established in Jesus Christ. ¹

Yes, I used a Greek word in my first sentence, *ekklesia* which is translated as ‘Church’
But the Greek says something that the word ‘church’ does not. *Ek-klesia* is about those who are convened by being ‘called out.’ in the sense of being drawn away from where they were in order to be somewhere else.

The ecclesia are recruited, convened and gathered to be the social congregation that represented all that God is about in Jesus Christ. *Ekklesia* forms the body, the family, the army, the people of God in the world. We are here as that *ekklesia*/church.

Now let’s ask:

Q1 Where is the *ekklesia* of God/ the Church of God recruited, drawn and called from?

A1 The ‘World’

To use other language:

God’s people are drawn from the kingdoms of the world to the Kingdom of God/Heaven

It’s the same world God so loved that he sent his son to redeem it yet he calls people from it.

It’s the world of humanity, all potential friends of God made for intimacy and fellowship but not aligned with heaven.

So, for us, we as *ekklesia*, as Church are about living as citizens of God’s heavenly Kingdom while in the world.

That is what *ekklesia* is all about

Q2 How are we doing at that?

How are you finding it trying to live in God’s Kingdom while the World as it’s kingdoms press around us?

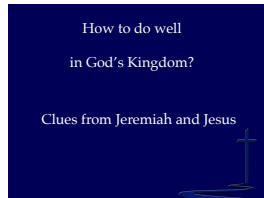
How do you experience it living in the world but not being of it?

Q3 Do you want to do well in the Kingdom of God?

A3 YES? Wonderful because today’s readings are a goldmine, they speak loudly about what it means to do well and what conditions help us do well in God’s Kingdom economy.

The Beatitudes are which we heard from Luke are part A of this.

¹ The usual transliteration for ἐκκλησία is ecclesia. I am using ‘k’ instead of ‘c’ to accentuate the Greek sense of the word as called out.

**Development:**

What does it mean to be doing well in God's Kingdom economy?

Thinking positively, Jeremiah prophesying just over 500 years before Jesus put it this way in chapter 17 v.v.7-8.

- 7 Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
- 8 They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

In other words, those who trust, who are faithful, who endure, who believe, who are obedient and expectant have cause to rejoice because they will be vindicated with blessing from God.

Jeremiah is encouraging God's people to put their roots down into the river of God. Live out of him and trust that God will sustain us. Such people will know God's blessing.

For people who believe God helps those who help themselves, or in the late 20th century secularized edition currently in fashion, the encouragement to believe in one's self, Jeremiah prophesied:

- 5 Thus says the LORD:
Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength,

Well, that's clear! Trust in God Blessed, Trust in yourself and human strength, Cursed.

So, to the answer the key question: What does doing well in God's Kingdom involve?

Answer: Trusting God as your strength.

Next question:

Q5 What are the ideal conditions for Trusting God as Jeremiah prophesied?

This is where Jesus' teaching comes in. Jesus as we hear him preaching to his community of disciples on the plain in Luke 6 goes a layer deeper to spell out, as only he can, what are the ideal conditions for anyone wanting trust God more and more. What circumstances are blessed because they open us up the grace of God's Kingdom?

The list of ideal conditions is short and to the point.

A5 The ideal conditions for knowing the blessing of God's Kingdom are:

- Poverty
- Hunger
- Persecution.

These are the best circumstances in God's economy of blessing through humble dependent trust on God's love and grace as proclaimed by Jesus.

Are we poor? Are we Hungry? Are we persecuted? If it is "no" on all three counts then we are not well placed for blessing in God's Kingdom. That may be a problem?

Coming a bit closer one circumstance that does bring some of this about is illness. People among us do get sick, sometimes seriously so for long periods. What do we do? We go to the doctor and we pray. We -ie: affluent Western Christians- typically have faith in the doctors and hope in God for our healing."

Q *What do the poor -and I mean really poor- do?*

A *They pray. I have seen this in PNG.*

So far I have been talking biblical theology. Is Jesus just Jesus in the Bible or is he still alive and backing his words today? Is the Kingdom of God just for then and there or here and now?

Third and final question: What does Jesus say are the unhelpful conditions for blessing in the Kingdom of God?

It is not easy to hear: Full stomachs, full wallets, things to laugh about and popularity.

In other words, if we are doing well in this world as it is we are cursed and not blessed in God. If we are doing well in this world as it is, we are unlikely to receive the blessing of God's Kingdom.

Why? Because why rely on God's Kingdom to bless us when we are doing very well in another kingdom - thank you very much. Why trust in God if the doctor knows what he is doing or the economy is going well or I am popular with enough of my friends?

This theme about being linked to one and not the other is going to get louder in this Gospel and it really challenges me:

By chapter 16 Jesus will say:

No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Luke 16:13

We cannot be successful and blessed in both the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom(s) of the world ruled by the devil. It just doesn't work.

If we are blessed by this world's kingdoms it is unlikely we will be blessed by the Kingdom of God.

The way this is set out puts the experience of persecution in the middle almost as hinge verse which I think provides a point of focus:

Luke 6:22 "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

If you seek to stand, speak or work for Jesus in today's world do not expect to be popular with people. In fact, if you are unpopular because of Jesus, Rejoice, leap for Joy because it is assurance

that you are in excellent company! Persecution is assurance that we are doing well in God's Kingdom and there is great blessing to come.

Implications and Conclusion:

So doing well by the world means being cursed and being cursed in the world creates the ideal conditions for being blessed the Kingdom of God.

3 Brief implications:

- a) Be very suspicious of anyone who says to you, "You can do well in the world and be blessed in the Kingdom." One expression of that is the so-called 'prosperity gospel' which stresses the message that God wants us prosperous in the world with all the trimmings, bells and whistles. I don't think Jesus is suggesting that.
- b) Something your parents told you may be wrong? Did you hear it said: "God helps those who help themselves"? That might be a twist on the protestant work ethic and common folk theology but it's not Jesus. Rather, God commands a blessing on those who respond to his Kingdom even when it involves poverty, hunger and persecution.
- c) How hard it must be to be a Christian politician in a secular democracy. To my eyes those in Christian political parties seem to have some better chance but the rest are working a very complicated field of tension. If you value Christians in politics, they need prayer and support.

What I have tried to do is open the words of Jesus.

They may be hard words to hear.

If that is so, talk with God about it.

Seek his lead as to how you can better position to be blessed in His Kingdom.